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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2006

In Today's Papers

Turkey-Iran Plane Dispute

All papers report Turkey rejected a charge by Tehran that an Iranian plane was forced to land at Istanbul airport because Ankara had denied it flight permission over Turkish territories. Diplomatic sources said the pilot asked to land at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport to refuel after being warned by Turkish authorities that the plane carrying Iranian ministers and lawmakers entered Turkish airspace without proper authorization. After refueling, the plane took off for Tehran. The Iranian administration summoned the Turkish Ambassador in Tehran Gurcan Turkoglu to express their disturbance over the matter. Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) Spokesman Namik Tan rejected reports that the plane had been forced to land, stressing that it had asked Turkey for permission to refuel. Vatan says that the plane had obtained permission to use Turkish airspace while flying to Venezuela, and had not notified Turkish officials en route to Iran.

Turkey-Greece to Hold First Joint Military Exercise

Milliyet and Radikal report Turkish and Greek navies are to hold their first ever joint military maneuvers in the southern Aegean Sea involving a small number of frigates on September 23. The Greek daily Ta Nea said bilateral cooperation of this nature was unique, quoting a Greek general staff source as saying this is the first time such cooperation has taken place.

Article 301, Halki Seminary, Case against Safak

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Radikal, Zaman, Yeni Safak and others: The ruling AK Party government is reluctant to dilute Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, often used to prosecute writers and journalists, because it fears boosting support for the nationalist MHP. Prime Minister Erdogan and other AKP officials want to see the implementation of the provision before launching more reforms in line with EU demands. The AKP is afraid that changes to Article 301 will be exploited by the MHP in election campaigns.

Sabah reports that AKP lawmakers had filed a proposal for amendments designed to pave the way for the reopening of Halki Seminary in Istanbul. The proposal said that non-Muslim Turkish nationals, including the members of the Greek, Armenian and Jewish minorities, had the right to study in minority schools. The proposal has been accepted by the parliament with the support of AKP, but was later pulled back in the face of reactions coming from CHP lawmakers.

The case against novelist Elif Safak, accused of "insulting Turkishness" in her new novel, was dropped Thursday morning with a ruling that there was not enough hard evidence.

PM Erdogan Asks Iraqi Government to Ban PKK

Vatan, Bugun, Hurriyet, Cumhuriyet and others: Vatan reports that PM Erdogan sent a letter to Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki on September 11 and urged him to stop PKK infiltrations to Turkey from Northern Iraq. PM Erdogan, reportedly, demanded the closing of all PKK affiliated offices in Iraq, as well. Cumhuriyet reports that being concerned that the Iraqi envoy to counter PKK might be a Kurd, Ankara relaxed after hearing the post went to a retired Sunni General.

Foreign Ministry Withdraws its Objection to al-Kadi Case

Vatan, Milliyet and others: Following the action of the Prime Ministry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also withdrew its objection to the Council of State ruling related to the Saudi Businessman Yassin al-Kadi, whose name is on the UN list of people supporting global terrorism. Earlier both the Prime Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had objected the court ruling that would keep al-Kadi off the terrorist list in Turkey.

ANKARA 00005537 002 OF 003

Ambassador Wilson on the PKK, Lebanon, Iran

Milliyet, Cumhuriyet and Yeni Safak report that in a speech he delivered at a meeting of the Turkish Contractors' Association, US Ambassador Ross Wilson promised to back Turkey "more decisively and visibly" in the fight against the PKK. Wilson said the US wanted to ensure that northern Iraq is not used as a base by the PKK militants. He noted the Iraqi government decision to close all PKK offices in Iraq was a small step, and that more measures would be put in place. Wilson emphasized that US Special Envoy for Countering the PKK, Joseph Ralston, had held talks with the Turkish and Iraqi authorities, and that his meeting with the PKK was out of the question. Wilson praised the Turkish decision to take part in the international force for Lebanon, stressing that the deployment would enhance the US-Turkey cooperation in third countries. The US Ambassador also lauded Turkey for supporting efforts for a diplomatic solution in the nuclear crisis with Iran.

Editorial Commentary the Papal Visit to Turkey

Writing in the tabloid Posta, Mehmet Ali Birand warned that the Pope's scheduled November tip to Turkey will be "a test" for the country: "The Pope's scheduled visit to Turkey became more important after recent developments. The Pope's recent remarks, which caused so much fury among Muslims, coupled with Turkey's excessive reaction, which made Turkey look like the Pope's leading critic, have increased the visit's importance incredibly. The storm has begun to subside, but one should not be fooled. Some political parties will try to exploit the matter to gain votes in the coming elections and you will see them flooding the streets during the Pope's visit. If they truly love their country, they should act differently. However, the way they show this love makes one think that their patriotism is just for show. The Pope's visit will be a test for Turkey. The international media will be following it very closely and every incident will be analyzed in detail. If effigies of the Pope are burnt on the streets and if people throw things at him wherever he goes, the story will make headlines around the world. If things get truly out of hand, the number of people who oppose Turkey's EU membership will increase. This will make Austria very happy and the entire Catholic world will be against us. Every time I think about this, I get depressed. Let's wait and see what those who really have Turkey's interests at heart will do."

TV Highlights
NTV, 7.00 A.M.

Domestic News

- Turkish Parliament Speaker Bulent Arinc said with regard to the remarks of Pope Benedict XVI against Islam that world leaders should refrain from statements which harm peace among religions.
- The main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal said his party would not give unconditional support to EU harmonization reforms.
- President Sezer urged universities to uphold secularism and fight against Islamist tendencies in an address yesterday marking the start of the new academic year.
- The World Bank and IMF have agreed to hold their annual 2009 meetings in Istanbul.

International News

- Presidents Bush and Ahmadinejad exchanged remarks at the UN with Bush labeling Iran a sponsor of terrorism and Ahmadinejad accusing the US and Britain of abusing their positions in the UN Security Council.
- Pope Benedict XVI stopped short of apologizing to Moslems again, saying only that he respects all religions, especially Islam, at a

ANKARA 00005537 003 OF 003

mass the pontiff held at the Vatican on Wednesday.

- Palestinian Prime Minister Haniya rejected conditions set by the Middle East quartet for resuming direct financial aid to the Palestinian administration. The quartet demands the formal recognition of Israel.
- Thailand's military coup leaders will choose a new prime minister within two weeks and step back from power, army chief General Sonthi Boonyaratglin said, adding that new parliamentary elections would be held in October 2007.
- Israeli soldiers confiscated about USD 1 million in a series of early morning raids Wednesday on West Bank money changers.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON